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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the Model Early Childhood Learning Program of Baltimore, Md., City Schools is to provide experiences for disadvantaged children which will constitute the prerequisite developmental history needed to undertake first grade concepts and skills. The project's stated objectives are: (1) to improve the measured aptitude or readiness for reading and other academic achievement of children from disadvantaged homes; (2) to provide these children with the means of attaining skills necessary to achieve success in the competitive and social worlds; (3) to improve their self concepts; and, (4) to improve the attitudes toward self and their parents. It was found that compared with children in control groups who have had no such experiences or with those who participated in other programs with similar purposes, project children achieved remarkable gains in IQ. (Author/RJ)

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Model Programs

Title III--Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Model Early Childhood Learning Program

Baltimore, Maryland

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research would indicate that educational achievement has a higher correlation with factors related to a child's family and background than it does with differences among schools.

This fact has led the Model Early Childhood Learning Program of Baltimore (Md.) City Schools to give parents an important part in the program. The project's purpose is to provide experiences for disadvantaged children which will constitute the prerequisite developmental history needed to undertake first grade concepts and skills.

Compared with children in control groups who have had no such experiences or with those who participated in other programs with similar purposes, project children achieved remarkable gains in IQ.

The Model Early Childhood Learning Program raises the level of reading achievement, increases number facility and the use of abstract symbols, and improves language development. Special emphasis is given to children's cognitive performance, as well as their social, emotional, and physical development. Through this many-faceted approach, and the training and use of parents as instructional and classroom aides, both children and adults benefit from this project.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Now in its second year of operation, the Model Early Childhood Learning Program has established learning centers in five Baltimore elementary schools where a high percentage of children are both socially and economically deprived. Organization of this project permits a child to enter at age 3 or 4 and to continue at successive levels through age 7.

The project's stated objectives are to:

- Improve the measured aptitude or readiness for reading and other academic achievement of children from disadvantaged homes.
- Provide these children with the means of attaining skills necessary to achieve success in the competitive and social worlds.
- Improve their self-concepts.
- Improve the attitudes toward self and their parents.

The project is specifically community-oriented: the several communities around the five centers have been actively involved in most project activities. This was true during development of the proposal and has remained true throughout the almost 2 years of operation. Teaching assistants (aides) are selected primarily from the neighborhood in which a center is located. Many of the aides selected for the current year had previously worked as unpaid parent volunteers.

ACTIVITIES

In developing this program, the project's staff members coded 269 objectives in concept formation and classified them under the following categories: self, color, form, texture, size, material, number, space, and movement. "Task boxes" were then developed for most of the 269 objectives. The task boxes, containing materials which can be used to achieve understanding of the concept involved, are arranged in a hierarchy according to the complexity of the related objective and of the task posed by the box's contents.

The program is organized to facilitate individualized instruction and continuity of learning. Each day specific activities are prescribed for every child, the prescription based on the child's performance of previous tasks. As he goes through the prescribed activity, the child demonstrates whether he is gaining an understanding of the task through his conversation with the teacher or aides who move through the room.

Upon completing one or more tasks, the child is formally tested. He is not advanced to a more complex task and related objectives until he demonstrates mastery of those preceding. When he does so, other activities are prescribed. They may be on the same level at which he is already working or they may be at the next level of the learning hierarchy. In any event, learning is continuous and care is taken to maintain skills developed along the way.

Despite the fairly continuous monitoring by staff members, a balance is maintained between structure and freedom in this program; and self-direction and creativity in a child are encouraged. An individual learning prescription on any given day includes many combinations of pers tion or one-to-one tut pendent or small-grou

The children also variety of activities o classrooms. During th are chartered for tri dren's Zoo, the Encha Patapsco State Park Baltimore and Columb are planned and dire and each child is a parent or a relative. S to each trip, parent orientation sessions o which should be us children's learning du on the skills the chil tice. After the trip, f for the home make Street type materials. lar year, trips made i hood emphasize speci

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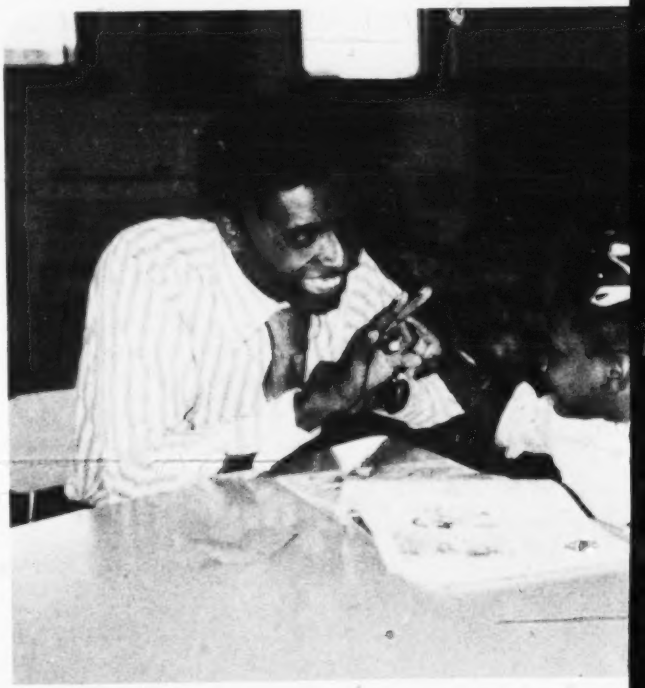

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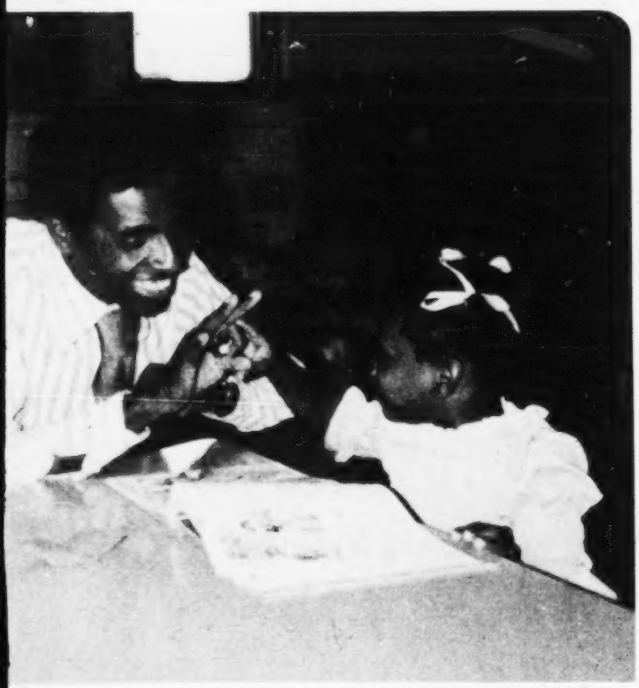
combinations of personalized instruction or one-to-one tutoring, and independent or small-group activities.

The children also participate in a variety of activities outside the center classrooms. During the summer, buses are chartered for trips to the Children's Zoo, the Enchanted Forest, and Patapsco State Park and for tours of Baltimore and Columbia, Md. The trips are planned and directed by parents, and each child is accompanied by a parent or a relative. Several days prior to each trip, parent-counselors hold orientation sessions on the techniques which should be used to guide the children's learning during the trip and on the skills the children should practice. After the trip, followup activities for the home make use of Sesame Street type materials. During the regular year, trips made into the neighborhood emphasize specific tasks.

Other program activities include food services and health care in the form of examinations and necessary followup treatment. Any condition which might impair a child's ability to learn is alleviated or eliminated wherever possible in this project.



STAFF AND INSERVICE TRAINING

The program's decentralized facilities require an overall director and at least one master teacher and two aides at each center. Any member of a center team may function as the "traveling teacher," tutor, small group instructor, or evaluator. The instructional duties of each adult are well defined, but teaching roles are flexible and regularly exchanged. The services of parent-counselors and a social worker are also periodically needed. Finally, since acquisition of certain skills by parents is one of the project's goals, as many parents as volunteer are involved in project activities.

The entire staff—project director, program assistants, teachers, teaching assistants, parent-counselors, and parents—participate in preservice training for 6 weeks during the summer. At this time they are instructed in program philosophy, teaching techniques, curriculum development, and progression of skills, and make decisions about selection of materials, organization of rooms, definition of staff roles and parental involvement, and ancillary services. Procedures and techniques to develop positive reinforcement of learning, behavior modification, and self-management by the children are among the most crucial elements of this training.

Parents who cannot participate in preservice sessions receive inservice training during program operations. A period out of 1 day a week may be set aside for professional development; in addition, an extended schoolday allows sessions for continuous evaluation and daily planning of appropriate activities for each child. Parents participate in these sessions and are involved in analysis, of children's characteristics as well as in techniques of teaching. If changes in emphasis or training of personnel or parents are needed, a center is closed for that purpose for a day.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Of the three particularly distinctive features of this project—the decentralization of centers into the neighborhoods, the stimulation and appeal to the children of the task boxes, and the quantity and quality of parents' volunteer aid— it is probably the latter which is most noteworthy. Parents are given rewarding roles which offer inducements to continue their participation. They assist the project staff in the preparation of the task boxes, aid during breakfast and luncheon, and help in directing and supervising the children's creative activities. The parents also provide a valuable communication link between the project and individuals and groups in the community who are sometimes difficult to reach.

Most important, parents are considered vital partners in project teaching. Under the guidance of the parent-counselors, they are trained in instructional methods and the use of materials which can make each home a learning center. The techniques may vary from those used in the centers and materials may include items found in most homes, such as squares of felt, wool, sandpaper, fur, and silk glued to the sides of small cardboard boxes to use in distinguishing textures, or pictures and figures cut from magazines, glued in scrapbooks, and used to reinforce the children's ability to identify colors, match shapes, and name objects.

Other children in the family and even in the neighborhood, who are not in the project, frequently benefit from the extension of the program into home learning situations.

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COSTS

It is estimated that this project is now serving one in four of all identified underprivileged children entering the Baltimore city schools. Annual expenditures per pupil are approximately $1,250.

Expenditures cover staff and consultative salaries, materials and equipment, and a variety of services, including health, welfare, food, transportation, and maintenance. Since the task boxes hold such items as colored paper, sandpaper, masonite, cardboard, rope, and other common materials, and since they are assembled, labeled, and packaged by parent volunteers, these important parts of the instructional program are relatively inexpensive. Other equipment should include one or two language masters and one cassette tape recorder or a reel-to-reel recorder in each classroom. Record players are also valuable additions.

In the Baltimore project, during the first year, health services cost somewhat more than $15,000, food approximately $41,000, and transportation about $25,000.

Total costs for a similar program depend on the locality, the adaptation designed, and the number of children served; but many costs are of a one-time-only nature.

EVALUATION

Evaluation has taken the form of pretests and posttests, program assessment, time samples of pupil and staff activities, Q-sorts, and process evaluation. The project was compared with a program for disadvantaged children, Early Admissions, operated by Baltimore City Schools since 1962, and with groups of children who had not been exposed to preschool training. Stanford-Binet pretests and posttests indicated that the mean IQ for children with no exposure to preschool decreased by 3.24 points; for Early Admissions children, increased by 5.9 points; and for project children, increased by 16.06 points, which represented a functional reclassification of these children from "below average" to "average." Pretests and postests for language development, using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, indicated that the growth in language was significantly greater at the .05 level for the project children than it was for either the Early Admissions or the control children. These findings, with the same detailed analysis being made, concurred with the Stanford-Binet results.

A Cognitive Objectives Test developed to measure the children's knowledge of color, form, texture, size, number, and movement showed the mean score for the project children to be more than twice that for children in Early Admissions—which has the same concept objectives—and more than three times that of the control children. Byproducts of evaluations were that the project children had gained attending or self-management skills which exceeded expectation, that 3-year-olds in the program had achieved as well as the 4-year-olds and would require an advanced program in 1971-72, and, finally, that the mean performance score of the full-day children was significantly higher than that of the half-day children.

IMPLEMENTATION

If implementation of the program must begin in a limited way, it is suggested that only one center—using the complete program design—be established rather than several centers in a fragmented fashion. This is because the program goals—especially as they relate to parent and community involvement—have fixed the program design, and a dilution thereof would produce correspondingly weaker results. For the same reason, decentralization into smaller projects is important, and project sites should be established within or as close to the neighborhood involved as possible.

First steps should include a survey of area needs followed by a survey of available resources, that is, the number and location of building spaces which can be used, rented, or bought. The target population should then be defined and necessary limits established.

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For further infor
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Miss Betty Show
Model Early Chil
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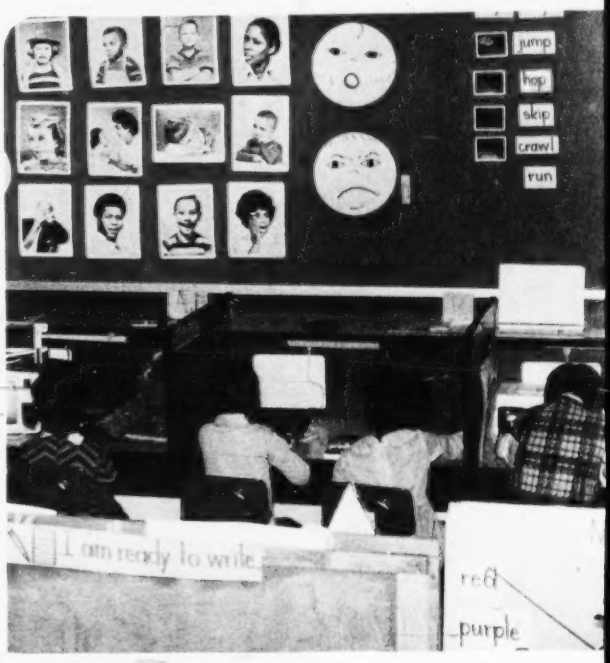
3 East 25th Stree
Baltimore, Maryla



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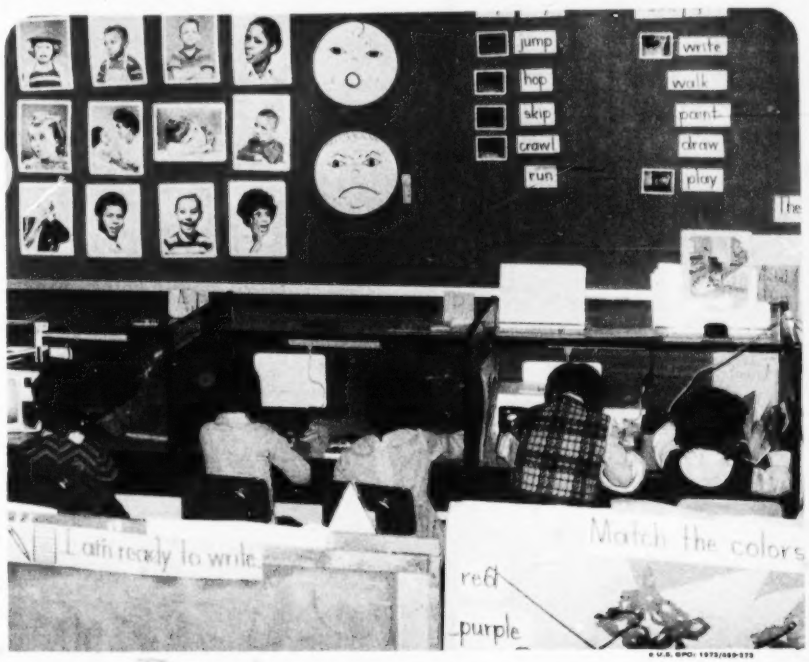
First steps should include a survey of area needs followed by a survey of available resources, that is, the number and location of building spaces which can be used, rented, or bought. The target population should then be defined and necessary limits established. The considerable work of staff selection and preservice training are next crucial steps.

Those wishing to implement this program have the benefit of the tremendous amount of research which went into the Model Early Childhood Learning Program. They may also consult with the program's director or staff.

For further information on the program, write:

Miss Betty Showell, Director
Model Early Childhood Learning Program
3 East 25th Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218



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